Implementation Plan

GPDE 5256A: Wikis, Podcasts and Online Learning for the K-12 Classroom

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"If you're not feeling a little bit uncomfortable about being a teacher or being in education right now, you're not really paying attention." (Will Richardson, 2011)

Don’t relax or you may get too comfortable. Don’t blink or you may miss it. We can’t get too comfortable with our current practices. We can’t turn a blind eye to what is happening with technology. Will Richardson, a leader in education, explains the feeling of many teachers who are paying attention to what is happening with education technology. Technology is here to stay; we cannot run from it but rather embrace it. The following is my take about the 21st century learner, Web 2.0 tools, online professional development and implementation plans for my classroom.

**(Part I)**

The 21st century learner is upon us. What is the 21st Century learner? How do we teach the 21st century learner? Where do we start? During my time learning in GPDE 5256A: Wikis, Podcasts and Online Learning for the K-12 Classroom I was able to answer these questions.

I currently teach at Maple Lake High school in Maple Lake, Minnesota. Class sizes in Maple Lake range from 60-75 students. Students I teach a math classes from 7th-9th grades. I teach four different curriculums. In 9th grade, I teach the Integrated I class. This class is the first of three classes designed for lower level math students. There are some remediation topics and new topics. Second I teach 8th grade math. This course is a Pre-algebra Course. Third, I teach a 7th grade Pre-algebra Course. This course is similar to 8th grade math. It is for 7th grade students who exceed standards. Lastly, I teach the 7th grade math course. This is the normal track for all 7th grade students who are not in Pre-algebra 7.

Since I started teaching 5 years ago I have been trying to incorporate technology as much as I can. During my first year, I basically taught with marker and a white board. I have come a long way since then. I currently have a Smart board, CPS Response pads, and access to a mobile computer lab. I am always looking for new ways to add technology to push students up Bloom’s Pyramid.

The 21st century has brought us the age of technology. Coming into the class I thought 21st Century Learning would revolve around students using technology. That is only part of the picture. This type of learner must not only possess the skills in technology, but also essential skills to survive in the ever-changing workplace.

The students coming into my classroom are 21st century learners. They were born well after the first computer and probably don’t remember when the first iPod hit the market. Now most of them are equipped with a smart phone or iPod that act as computers in their pocket. Most of their questions are answered on Google and most of their conversations are electronic.

To me the 21st learner needs to be social. They are exposed to a lot of external stimuli including video games, TV, and YouTube. But they have to learn the social skills that run with technology they use. I believe the 21st century learner needs to be collaborative both personally and digitally. According to Tony Wagner, author of *The Global Achievement Gap* (2008) “the concept of teamwork today is very different from what it had been twenty years ago” (p. 22). There are still face-to-face meetings in today’s workplace. But with advances in technology there are conference calls, webcasts, and video conferencing. This advancement does come with some adversity. Employees lacked the desired social interactions they need to be part of these virtual teams (Wagner, 2008). The 21st century learner also needs to be culturally inclined. The workforce is becoming more diverse and it becomes more important to know about cultures and religion. Wagner (2008) stated the importance of high school graduates to have the awareness and appreciation for the diverse cultures of the world.

I plan to make my classroom much more collaborative in the future. In my current practices, I do not use a lot of collaboration. To me social interaction and collaboration define the students of today. It is so easy to collaborate digitally. There will be much more collaboration in class. I have changed my seating in my room to allow pods of students to sit together. This will promote personal collaboration. I also plan to incorporate digital collaboration. One new initiative in my class will be the implementation of reflective journals. Students will start with journal writing on paper with pencil. During the year I will transition students to an online blog called KidBlog to record and reflect their thoughts. Students will be able to collaborate with each other online through their blogs.

The 21st learner needs to be a problem solver. Having the world at their fingertips isn’t always a good thing. It is so easy to find information on the web but that doesn’t require problem-solving skills. Looking something up on Google would just be understand on Bloom’s Pyramid. We can look up anything, but is the first site reliable? Just because we see a story on Yahoo! News does that make it important and relevant or even true news? Effective problem solvers will be skeptical. We can teach our students proper techniques for making searches and judging credibility of information. Lynne Munson (2010) defines 21st century learning as “20th- (or even 19th!-) century learning but with better tools”. She goes on to say that students are fortunate to have these tools at their disposal to get information much faster than their predecessors. But technology should be used to acquire more knowledge, not know less (Munson, 2010). I believe students need use these tools whenever possible, but have the problem solving skills to filter information on the web. Students also need to think for themselves and can’t believe everything they see or read. With knowledge at our fingertips it shouldn’t be an excuse to know less.

In my classroom I like the idea of students having tools to help them with their learning. I plan to let students use their smart phones and iPods more in class. The tools are going to be there it is my job to teach them how to use it effectively. I will instill in students to use the tools but always be skeptical. We can’t believe everything we find on the web.

What are the necessary skills needed to “survive” in the new world of work? Most of all I believe these learners must possess social interaction (personal and digital) and problem solving skills. These are great skills that define the 21st learner. According to Wagner (2008), “ we need to ensure that students are differently educated for the future” (p. 9). To adjust to the 21st century we need to take to look at what we can change in the old world classroom to prepare students for the new world of work.

A lot of things have changed since the 19th or 20th century. I believe a lot of the necessary skills students need today at the same as what they needed previously. The biggest difference is the tools students have today. Previously, I quoted Munson saying that 21st-century learning is just 19th or 20th century learning but with much better tools. I couldn't agree with that more. In the workforce, people have always needed communication skills and problem solving skills. These skills are still needed today but they look a little different. Communicating is not always face-to-face. Now it can be YouTube videos, podcasts, video conferencing, blogging, and social networking. Learning to communicate in this new way is essential for students entering the workforce. People working in groups can accomplish more than people working alone. Collaboration is much easier now with technology.

Problem solving also looks a little different. Information is easy to find but with what information is credible and reliable. We get stuck with a problem; we have much more access to information databases. The difference now is we need to be able to sift through to get to the credible and reliable information.

To get the ball rolling with technology a school must be equipped with the necessary means to provide for students. I feel my school is well equipped to meet the technology needs of students. Some schools may not be as fortunate. If you want your students to meet the needs of a 21st century learner you may have to advocate in your school to get the necessary technology. Technology is very expensive but there are ways to talk to your administration or school board about the matter. According to Anne O’Brien (2013), who blogs for Edutopia, “advocates often appear cold and impersonal...and use too much jargon.” Stakeholders in the school do not want to hear about all the studies and statistics on the matter. She goes on to say “Advocates would also be wise to connect their message to the key beliefs underlying Americans' views on education” (O’Brien, 2013). Technology can be new to many members in an administration or school board capacity. It is very important to focus on the impact it will have on students and relate to the beliefs of the school.

One thing I will walk away from this course that changed me is that the 21st learner is not defined only by using technology. I think that the 21st century learner is mostly the same as far as the skills needed in life. Technology is a tool that enhances these skills. We can get things done faster, and collaborate with more people. I am excited to start seeing these changes in my classroom. I am excited to prepare students with these new collaboration ideas and problem solving skills.

**(Part 2)**

*Ideas are easy, implementation is hard.* - Guy Kawasaki

There are so many tools out there for teachers and students to use. It is hard to decide where to start. Instead of making wholesale changes, I am looking to take this a little at a time. This coming year will see my classroom making some adjustments and implementing these tools into practice. I will use these tools with my students to help them push up Bloom’s Pyramid. I will also use these tools to further my professional development.

The biggest area technology tools will be used is for student learning, success and achievement. There are so many great tools to help teachers further student learning. One tool I plan to use next school year is KidBlog. According to the KidBlog co-founder Matt Hardy (2013), “Kidblog is designed for K-12 teachers who want to provide each student with an individual blog. Students publish posts and participate in academic discussions within a secure classroom blogging community. Teachers maintain complete control over student blogs and user accounts.” To start the year I will be using reflective journals for students to analyze their work and push critical thinking and problem solving skills. They will start with paper and pencil but we will eventually pack our bags and move to KidBlog. By reflecting and blogging about topics it will give students a chance to analyze their own work and classmates work. They will also be able to evaluate their own work and others work. As a teacher, I will be able to evaluate their work easily. KidBlog will give me access to each student’s blog and I can give feedback privately or publicly. Another great thing about KidBlog is I won’t need student’s emails to sign them up. That will keep their email and my email private, which is great. Kidblog is a tool that will push students to analyze and evaluate.

Kidblog is used to replace the traditional method of journaling on pencil and paper. Students will create journals online and collaborate over the web. I can foresee some challenges. There are still a few students who do not have a computer or Internet connection at home. There are plenty of computers in our school for student use so I would push those students to work on that during the school day.

Schools are constantly pushing student achievement and success. Technology is huge to help students in these areas. I am currently part of the PBIS/RTI committee at Maple Lake High School. One area I find difficult is referring students for interventions and tracking student interventions. It is hard for teachers to meet in one spot to talk about a student because our busy schedules. One way to solve this problem would be to use a Google Doc that is shared with all teachers. When it is shared with all teachers, they will be able to track the student. My plan is to start with the 7th grade. I am going to develop a spreadsheet with student names that is shared with all 7th grade teachers. Teachers can share which students need to be referred for interventions and can leave notes or feedback about interventions they tried or that worked with a student. This can be a running document to keep track of all the students. This will help student’s achievement and success by teachers working together. This also provides students to reflect about what works and what doesn’t work. Students can evaluate themselves after the interventions.

Although I feel like this will get the ball rolling with student interventions I do think it may present some challenges. Some of our staff is still unsure how to use Google Docs. Also, teachers would have to remember to check the list. Some of our teachers are old school and like to keep their own notes and try to figure things out alone, not collaboratively. In the PBIS/RTI committee, our current system is talking about struggling students at the meeting and keeping some notes in a binder. Once the binder is shut no one sees it. If we put that info online in a Google Doc I can see it being much more useful information.

These tools are not only for students. I have found so many useful websites, blogs, and articles that will increase my professional development. The information out there for teachers is overwhelming. I can’t find the time to always check what is out there and read the information. To help me organize the websites, blogs, and articles I am using a tool called Feedly. Feedly is a way to follow blogs and news articles. Feedly will show you all of your unread blog postings. This is very convenient because I won’t have to look up every single blog I follow, it will all be in one place. I am currently following the blog of Dan Meyer, a well recognized math teacher from California. I also follow Larry Ferlazzo who is an inner city teacher who blogs relentlessly on the new happenings in technology education. I recently got an iPhone 5 so I check my Feedly daily. I will be looking to add more to my Feedly to push my professional development.

Another way I will push my professional development is through Twitter. Twitter is a place where you can follow the micro blog of experts in any field. Twitter provides a feed of all the people you follow into one place. The tweets are limited to 140 characters or less, but often times there are links to great blogs or helpful articles for teachers. I use Twitter to get the latest information in education. It is very important whom you follow so you can be the first to know about new perspectives in education. For educators, time is of the essence. Twitter is another ways to get all of your valuable information in one place. According to Laura Bates (2012), “Twitter is fast becoming one of the richest resources for picking up teaching tips and tricks.” She goes on to say that trying to find people to follow can be time-consuming and frustrating. Also following to many feeds can leave you overwhelmed (Bates, 2012). She developed a list of the top ten people to follow for technology education. I found these people very useful for my practice. One person in particular is Eric Sheninger. According to the article, Sheninger is a principal whose “tweets provide consistently new and exciting education technology ideas and resources” (Bates, 2012). I check Twitter multiple times a day and with the limited number of people I follow I can keep up with all of their tweets.

The last way I am practicing online professional development is through Facebook. I recently joined the group “The League of Extraordinary Teachers” created by Michael Rogers, a science teacher at Sauk Rapids Middle School. The group consists of 353 members as of July 17th, 2013. Similar to Twitter, there is a feed of information that anyone in the group can post. I will find neat Web 2.0 tools or interesting articles posted in the feed. I really like this form of online professional development because there is rich discussion about current articles or themes in education. It is much easier to have discussion on Facebook than on Twitter. This will improve me professionally and give me great ideas for education.

It is hard to believe all of the information out there for professional development. I think the key is to find a way to organize the information and weed out any of the white noise. My recommendation would be to get a Feedly account if you follow blogs so all of your information can be in one place. For Twitter users, make sure you follow a manageable amount of people so you don’t get buried in tweets. Facebook is an excellent forum for great discussion.

**(Part 3)**

With all the great resources out there for professional development, how do I make sure I am using the resources to the best of my ability? I need to make myself accountable for improving myself professionally. I have outlined some ways I can improve myself above. Here is my plan on how to keep myself accountable.

In April 2013 I bought an iPhone 5. I was skeptical about smart phones for a long time. I didn’t think as a teacher I would need one. I quickly found out how great they are! Any type of smart phone keeps you connected and allows you to work more efficiently; even if you are a teacher. I found out how nice it was to have during work for answering emails or sending reminders to students. It was great. Now for professional development it is even better. It really is like having a computer in your pocket.

I have Twitter, Facebook and Feedly on my iPhone. I have notifications set up for these apps so I get reminders when there are new things to see. It keeps me very organized. I sometimes don’t have time to read things right away but I can go back and look at old reminders to keep up with what I missed. I won’t have any problem keeping up with these different accounts because I am always connected with my phone.

When implementing something new into your class there are trials and errors, reflection, and re-planning. I am prepared for this when I implement journals going online to KidBlog. To assess myself, I will be looking the percentage of blog posts out of the total assigned. I want my students to participate as much as possible. My main goal will be to look at the percentage of participation. If students are participating it will be an enriching process.

I foresee times when students will not participate to the fullest. My plan is to pull them aside talk to them about and make sure they can get it done. I will try interventions to help them get back on track. My first intervention would be having them complete the assignment at school. 7th grade students at our school have time set aside everyday just or personal work time. I would let them use my computer or go to a computer lab. Second, I will get the student’s parent involved to see why they are unable to get the journal reflection/ blog done. Usually a call home to Mom or Dad can go a long way.

Implementing the Google Doc for staff may come with more challenges but here is my plan. I will present my strategy at our first committee meeting with details about the Google Doc and how it should be used. After that my plan is to just be a salesman and help remind teachers about how the document works. I believe it will be extremely valuable for communication between teachers and for student success. Each meeting we will evaluate the progress and make the necessary changes.

If the Google Doc does not work for referrals for interventions and tracking interventions, my plan would be to somehow get the information from our meeting out to the necessary staff. That will be beneficial to see notes on students and to help them out.

**(Part 4)**

I have gained a lot of knowledge during the six weeks of this course. I have read many articles, watched videos, and read blogs that have been beneficial to my practice.  There is so much great information out there to learn from.

Our classroom must adapt to the 21st century learning. When defining 21st century learning Karen Cator (2010) stated, “Success in the 21st century requires knowing how to learn. They must develop strong critical thinking and interpersonal communication skills in order to be successful in an increasingly fluid, interconnected, and complex world.” I believe what defines 21st century learning is understanding how to learn; what is true what is not true. The 21st century learner has to be collaborative and social through person relationships and digital relationships. She goes on to say “The opportunities afforded by technology should be used to re-imagine 21st-century education, focusing on preparing students to be learners for life” (Cator, 2010).

Collaboration is not only a skill for students. Collaboration in professional development is essential for teaching careers. What is effective professional development? Effective professional development is defined by Hayes Mizell (2010) as enabling “educators to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students’ learning challenges.” Teachers need to have effective collaboration with each other. With online professional development tools such as Twitter, Facebook and Feedly I can develop myself professionally outside of my school. According to Mizell, “The effectiveness of professional development depends on how carefully educators conceive, plan, and implement it” (2010). This is where the challenge lies. I have spent time reading and processing all of this information. Implementing this into my practice is the key to see what processes will improve my students.

**Conclusion**

As a teacher I need to feel a little uncomfortable to make me pay attention to what my colleagues are doing. I don’t only need to keep track of coworkers in my school, but teachers all over the world who have new and innovative ideas. The students we see today are preparing for jobs that do not even exist yet. They need preparation for everything. Using all the tools to give them experience will make them better. Most importantly we need to embrace technology. Technology is here to stay. “There are huge challenges the Internet is bringing us, but huge opportunities as well.” (Richardson, 2011)

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